

Adolescents in Single-Parent Families: A Review

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ABSTRACT

Adolescence, a critical developmental stage, is significantly influenced by family structure, particularly in single-parent households. This review examines the psychosocial, educational, behavioral, and economic challenges faced by adolescents raised by a single parent. While such environments may foster resilience and independence, they often correlate with heightened risks of emotional distress, academic underperformance, behavioral issues, and economic hardship. Contributing factors include reduced parental supervision, financial constraints, and limited emotional support. The review highlights the pivotal role of social work interventions in mitigating these challenges through targeted support in education, emotional well-being, family dynamics, and community integration. Social workers employ individualized strategies, facilitate access to mental health resources, and advocate for inclusive policies to promote adolescent adjustment and resilience. The findings underscore the need for comprehensive support systems and future research into long-term outcomes and intervention efficacy for adolescents in single-parent families.

Keywords: *Adolescents, Single-Parent Families*

Adolescence is a transitional phase between childhood and adulthood, characterized by significant physical, emotional, cognitive, and social development. This period is marked by curiosity, experimentation, and identity formation, which can shape future well-being. Adolescence is crucial for establishing independence, forming peer relationships, and developing decision-making skills. Positive experiences during this period contribute to long-term well-being, while negative influences can lead to adverse psychosocial outcomes. A single-parent family is one in which a child is raised by one parent due to divorce, separation, death, or personal choice (Amato, 2000). Single parents face unique challenges, including financial strain, emotional stress, and the dual burden of caregiving and earning (Damon et al, 2003). While single parenting can foster resilience and independence in children, it may also pose difficulties related to emotional support, academic performance, and social development (Olaleye and Oladeji, 2010).

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Single-parent households are increasingly common worldwide. In the United States, approximately 13.7 million households were headed by a single parent in 2020, with 80% led by mothers (U.S. Census Bureau, 2020). Governments and social organizations recognize the need for support systems to assist single parents in managing their responsibilities effectively (Barajas, 2011).

Impact on Adolescents

Growing up in a single-parent household can influence adolescents in multiple ways. Some children develop resilience, independence, and close relationships with their primary caregiver (Hanson et al 1996). However, others may experience emotional distress, financial instability, and academic difficulties. The absence of one parent often means increased responsibilities for adolescents, such as assisting with household chores or contributing to family income, which can interfere with their education and personal development (Amato, 2000).

Challenges Faced by Adolescents in Single-Parent Families

- **Psychological Challenges**

Adolescence is a period of emotional instability and identity exploration. The absence of one parent can intensify stress, anxiety, and self-esteem issues. Adolescents from single-parent households may experience feelings of abandonment or guilt, particularly in cases of parental desertion.

- **Educational Challenges**

Parental involvement significantly impacts academic performance. Single parents, burdened with multiple responsibilities, may struggle to supervise homework or attend school meetings, contributing to lower academic performance. Research further indicates that adolescents in single-parent households are three times more likely to drop out of high school than those from two-parent families (Bhat et al, 2019).

- **Behavioral Challenges**

Children from single-parent families are at a higher risk of engaging in antisocial behavior. Studies suggest that limited parental supervision, financial constraints, and social isolation contribute to increased delinquency, substance abuse, and aggression. Single-parent adolescents are also more susceptible to peer pressure and are more likely to make independent decisions without consulting a parent. Daryanai et al. (2016) found that single mothers often engage in psychologically controlling behaviors, leading to higher rates of depressive symptoms and externalizing disorders in their children. Moreover, adolescents raised in single-parent households report lower self-esteem, less empathy, and higher aggression levels (Gupta, A., & Kashyap, S., 2020).

- **Economic Challenges**

Economic hardship is one of the most significant stressors for single-parent families. Studies indicate that children from low-income single-parent households have fewer educational opportunities, higher dropout rates, and lower career prospects. Financial strain also impacts parental mental health, reducing their ability to provide emotional and academic support (Mabuza,2014).

Social work Interventions to Address challenges Faced by Adolescents in Single-Parent Families

Social workers offer multiple interventions to address the challenges faced by adolescents in single-parent families. These interventions are tailored to the specific needs of adolescents based on their unique psychosocial context to build resilience and alleviate distress.

Interventions to improve academic functioning

The most fundamental role of Social workers is to identify and address educational challenges faced by adolescents in single-parent families, such as inadequate educational methods and lack of advocacy for their rights. They are responsible for implementing programs that enhance educational engagement and provide resources to improve academic performance (Wang & Li, 2012). Through working closely with schools, social workers help address behavioural issues and support academic performance, which can decline during adolescence in single-parent families. They implement intervention programs that target specific behavioural problems and promote positive developmental outcomes (Barber, 2003) and (Wahab et al., 2024)

Interventions to improve emotional well-being

Social workers play a crucial role in addressing mental health issues, including anxiety and depression, which are prevalent among adolescents in single-parent households. They do it by facilitating access to mental health resources and promote preventive measures, such as mindfulness programs, to support emotional well-being (Howard et al., 2024).

Social workers offer counselling and support services to help adolescents cope with emotional and psychological challenges, such as depression and anxiety, which are more prevalent in single-parent families (Gupta & Kashyap, 2020). Moreover, social workers work with adolescents to develop coping mechanisms and resilience, promoting mature self-reliance and positive goal setting (Barber, 2003).

Interventions to improve family functioning

Social workers facilitate improved communication between single parents and their adolescents, which is essential for understanding and addressing stressors faced by the youth (Hartos & Power, 2000). In addition, social workers assist in establishing effective monitoring strategies that help parents stay informed about their children's activities and emotional well-being, which is linked to better adolescent adjustment.

Social workers help single-parent families identify and build on their strengths, such as conflict resolution and problem-solving skills, which are crucial for maintaining healthy family dynamics. They provide guidance on improving parent-child relationships, which can mitigate the risk of adolescent behavioral issues and suicidal tendencies (Hollenbeck et al., 2003).

Interventions to improve social functioning

Social workers encourage community involvement and support networks, recognizing the importance of intergenerational relationships, such as those with grandparents, in providing stability (Scholtz et al., 2024). Moreover, social workers also work to create inclusive environments that foster acceptance and support for single-parent families within community and faith-based organizations.

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Social workers connect families with community resources and services that can alleviate financial and social stressors, thereby improving the overall family functioning. They advocate for policies and programs that support single-parent families, ensuring that adolescents have access to necessary educational and extracurricular opportunities (Wahab et al., 2024).

CONCLUSION

Single-parent family is an increasingly prevalent family structure worldwide. While adolescents raised in these households face psychological, educational, behavioral, and economic challenges, many also develop resilience and independence. Addressing their needs through educational support, counseling, and financial assistance can improve their well-being and success in life. Future research should explore long-term outcomes for adolescents from single-parent families and the effectiveness of intervention programs.

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Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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